

9 Reasons Why Your Meditation Is “Not Progressing” (And What To Do About It)

You know that meditation has several [benefits](#). Everyone is raving about it.

Maybe you meditate sometimes, or even every day, but you don't feel that your meditation is unfolding as well as you expected. Or perhaps you feel that your practice is not going anywhere.

You are not alone. In the past several months, I've answered hundreds of emails and comments from my readers, and I've noticed the most common “meditation mistakes” that prevent people from going deeper in their meditation, and reaping more of its benefits. In this post I'll talk about these patterns with you.

1. You don't practice it consistently

Of all the reasons, this is the most common!

Meditation needs to be practiced daily, for it to make a true impact on your life. Of course, every time you sit there is some benefit – even if only purely physical –, whether you perceive it or not. But mental and emotional transformation only comes with consistent practice.

So **consistency** should be your primary focus when starting or growing a meditation practice – and *not* the length you sit, or how well you can fold your legs. Ten minutes everyday is better than half an hour three times a week.

You use your mind during **all** your waking hours. So your conditioned patterns of thoughts and emotion are being reinforced 24-7. That is why it's absolutely essential that you reinforce your meditation skills every day as well.

Your mind works every day. That's why your meditation should work every day too!

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The easier way to create this habit is by meditating first thing in the morning, before breakfast. Start with **two minutes per day** if you need to, but have the determination to never miss a day, *no matter what*.

Have a busy day tomorrow? Wake up a few minutes earlier and sit.

Are you traveling and sharing a hostel room this week? Meditate in the bathroom, or in a park.

Not sure you are doing it right, or have the right posture? Do it anyway – and read about it later.

Don't know what technique to use? Follow a guided meditation from an app like [Headspace](#) or [Insight Timer](#). And when you have time, read about the several traditional [meditation techniques](#).

You get the picture. Have the attitude that no circumstance, be it external or internal, can mess with your commitment to meditate **today**.

The following post will give you a better structure to start your habit: [The Ultimate Guide to Building a Meditation Habit](#).

2. You expect too much too soon



It's ok that what you started with meditation was the expectation of its [several benefits](#). However, once you have already built the habit, try to let go of all expectations, and simply do the practice **for its own sake**. Just like you take a shower, eat and sleep every day.

How to make that mindset shift?

Start *enjoying the practice itself*. Enjoy the way it feels after you have sat – how you get calmer, clearer, more centered. Of course, meditation might not feel like that all the time, but if you have been practicing it long enough, you will understand that *in average* it feels quite good.

Many of the deeper meditation benefits come only after months or years of daily practice. So holding your expectations lightly is a must, so you can stay with it for the long haul.

3. You don't prepare before you practice

You can simply sit and start your meditation, any time of the day, like most people do. But your session can go much deeper if you take just a couple of minutes beforehand to **relax your body**, **calm your breath**, and **affirm your intention**.

It can be as simple as just doing a couple of stretches, taking three deep breaths, and affirming your intention, “Ok, I will focus now”. For more details check out the first three items of this post: [7 Tips To Experience Deeper Meditation](#).

4. You jump from technique to technique

In the first months of your meditation practice, it's ok to try different techniques, or to do a different guided meditation every day. However, after some time you want to choose a particular technique, and stick to it.

Different people do indeed work better with different techniques. So it's important to experiment with [different techniques](#), until you find what works best for you. Perhaps you can try one for 1-4 weeks, to get an initial “feel” for it before moving on to another if the meditation isn't right for you. It's important, though, to find one technique for yourself, and then stick with it.

This is especially the case for concentration meditation. With each session you do with the same object – let's say your breath, or a mantra – that object becomes more “charged” with attention. Your mind becomes more intimate with it, so to speak. This affinity, in turn, makes it easier to maintain focus on that object in future sessions.

5. You keep doubting if you are doing it right



Because you care about your practice, and want to improve, you may tend to overanalyse it. This was a hindrance in my own practice for a long time. It's a mistake that can take very subtle forms, so we need to be alert not to engage in this type of mental masturbation.

The problem with self-evaluating your practice too much is two-fold:

- It keeps your mind busy, during the practice, with analyzing your mental states, rather than *being in the meditation process*
- It often *demotivates* you, when you can't find a satisfactory answer to the question "Am I doing this right?". If you conclude that you are not doing it right, or you can't figure it out, you are likely to give up.

So you need to let that go and *just practice*. Time will bring you clarity about the meditation process, as it becomes more of an *experience* for you rather than something you need to understand and describe.

Keep hungry, keep learning, keep experimenting with subtle differences in your approaches. If you have a good [meditation teacher](#) or a community, then pose your questions as clear as you can and see what you can learn. But know that **you will need to keep moving forward, despite your uncertainties.**

Trust me, things get clearer with time and practice.

Understand that meditation is a simple two-step process:

- **Step 1:** put your attention on the meditation object, and keep it there for as long as you can
- **Step 2:** notice when you get distracted, as soon as you can, and repeat step one

Your primary goal is simply to notice as quickly as you can when distraction happens. Maybe in your first weeks your mind may often wander for 2-5 minutes before you even realize that it has wandered. Gradually make this gap shorter, by being more aware of what's happening inside of you. This is **mindfulness**.

Your secondary goal is to keep your attention, moment after moment, on your meditation object. In the beginning you may be able to do that for only 3-5 seconds, but with time and practice it increases. This is **concentration**. Tools like the [Muse Headband](#) can help you have better insight on how well you are concentrating.

If you do these two things as well as you can, then you **are doing it right!** And if you would like to better understand the mechanics of meditation, check out my post on the [process of meditation](#).

6. You don't give it enough attention and intention



If you do physical exercise in a sloppy way, you can't really complain that you are not getting much benefit from it. The same goes for meditation. You need some intensity of effort and resolve.

There is a beautiful metaphor in Buddhism: *To practice as if one's head is on fire*. If your head were on fire, I don't think you would be distracted with thoughts about your daily tasks and what you should have for lunch. [Please don't put your head on fire; this is just a metaphor!]

While that degree of intensity may be hard to cultivate, I find this image helpful and inspiring. The greater your commitment to meditation, and your *intention* to deepen it, the more your mind will be still and engaged in the practice.

Don't meditate as if it's just another task to check off your list. Sit with a feeling of reverence, as if you are about to start the most important activity of your day.

And, once the end bell rings, don't jump off to your next task. Instead breathe in deeply, wait a few seconds, and then slowly start moving out of your meditation. This helps to carry along the experience of meditation to the rest of your day.

7. You beat yourself up when you get distracted

If you are following the process outlined in point 5, there is no need to criticize yourself for how often you get distracted during meditation. It's absolutely normal, and

part of the process. For most people it will take months, if not years, to arrive at a point where they experience a meditation session without any distraction.

So don't be harsh with yourself. Self-criticism just takes you a step further away from meditation. Instead, be glad that you noticed you got distracted, and simply bring the attention back.

8. You keep your mind too busy during the day



Wait, but isn't that the reason why I *need* meditation?

Yes. You need meditation, among other reasons, because your mind is too restless. It's not under your control. It goes off into wrong directions, and into unhelpful patterns of thinking. It keeps reinforcing negative conditioning and mindsets. It makes you hate yourself, or be less productive, or less content.

Just as the quality of your meditation influences how your mind is during the day, the way you keep your mind during your day also influences your meditation. No 20 minutes of meditation, however deep, will be able to overpower 16 hours of restlessness.

As a comparison: how effective would 30 minutes at the gym be, if for the rest of the day you were drinking soda and eating loads of junk food? The same goes with meditation. If you are constantly drinking the soda of restlessness, and eating the junk food of destructive thoughts and addictive emotions – your meditation will only partially cleanup the damage.

In my practice I found that the deeper I went into meditation, the more I enjoyed the peace of a centered mind. I naturally became disinclined to waste time in so useless thoughts and meaningless activities! Likewise, the more my life and mind became organized – by using tools like GTD and having clarity on what I'm doing – the easier it became to concentrate better in my sessions.

I don't say this to be harsh. I'm just drawing attention to the fact that *meditation is essential, but it is not enough*. Meditation gives you greater space between you and your thoughts and emotions. It gives you tools to have more clarity in your internal world. But you will still need to make use of this space and self-awareness to make better choices.

Meditation is essential, but not enough. You also need to be mindful of what thoughts you are...

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So develop the **habit of observing your mind** and seeing what's going on inside you. This will greatly help your meditation; and your meditation will make this process easier. It's a self-reinforcing positive loop.

Further learning: [Episode 10](#) of LiveAndDare podcast.

9. You consume too much media



A huge part of our restlessness is created or at least reinforced by the media we consume. Movies, news, social media, articles, forums, games, TV, etc. This is a challenge that the meditators of previous centuries did not have to face.

Another reason why we need meditation more than ever!

When we expose our brain to a lot of information – so it is only natural that all these images and ideas will show up when we sit, triggering distracting emotions and further rumination. This is especially so because most of the media we are exposed to is *designed* to put us in a state of craving, restlessness, anger or fear.

Therefore, if you want a deeper transformation in your mental and emotional states, it's a great help to:

- Limit the *types* of media you consume. Ask yourself how the things you watch/read/listen to make you feel. What types of programs do they install in your brain?
- Limit the *amount* of media you consume. Like setting rules of no screens after 10pm, or before breakfast. Or limiting checking email and Facebook to three times a day.
- Go on “media fasts”. Try one weekend per month, or one day each week.

These habit changes will not only positively influence your meditation, but also make you less stressed and more productive. You will be more present to the now, as it happens.

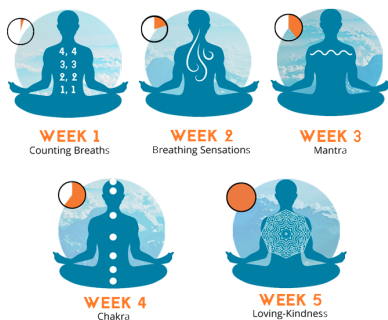
Final thoughts

Don't feel overwhelmed. If you find yourself caught in more than one of these "mistakes", work on them one at a time. Start with the ones that are easier to change, or that would have the biggest impact.

Meditation is a lifetime practice, and not something that you master in a couple of months. Re-conditioning the way your mind works does takes time and consistent efforts.

Even if some of these obstacles are present in your practice, you will **still** gain benefit from sitting. But, if you really want to improve your meditation, reap more [benefits](#), and go deeper into what it can do for you, then use the tips in this post to optimize your practice. Trust me, you will not regret it.

Check out also my 5-Week step-by-step meditation course, [Master Your Mind](#), for effective strategies for building a meditation habit and integrating your practice.



It's not enough that meditation is becoming popular. We need to raise awareness also about how to meditate more effectively. If you are with me on this, please **share this post**.

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